The Significance of Art in Language Arts

for Struggling Readers and Writers

Infusing Art into Language Arts

Why Art?

>Multiple Intelligence - art is a powerful channel for learning for many students who may struggle with language.

> Memory is associative. If a child with short term, active, or long term memory problems can associate the work she is doing in class with art, her retention goes up and information can be retrieved faster.

> Art is enjoyable for kids. They like it and will work harder to produce quality work because they can easily judge what is good. Many still struggle to recognize quality in writing.

> Peer recognition - those who may not get recognized by peers as being successfully academically can demonstrate rigor through art.

> Art can help develop good reading and thinking skills - how do you help students develop that "videocam" we want them to turn on when they read? Using art to make literature come alive vividly illustrates what we want them to "see" in their mind as they read.

> Art can be used to demonstrate many aspects of good writing - good art is like good writing; the artist has paid attention to tone/mood, audience, and purpose. Use that with your students!

Why Technology?

Do you want to make your students' work matter to them? Publish on the Internet! Create a class website or teach them how to construct their own pages. Take pictures and scan in their work. You'll see a huge investment in quality as students realize that their work will be online for friends and family to view.

Okay, I hear you. Now what?

Here are some projects I've used over the years with my students. (Realize that I don't use all of them every year.) I've often worked with the art teacher when I felt insecure about my art skills, but art is not the point, here. Language Arts is the emphasis.

Literature

> Setting - have the students draw or paint settings and watch them dive back into the text for details. Have them generate maps and add significant places to make directional relationships clear, construct cross section of houses or ships, or use software to draw this on computers (my students use all kinds of software, but Paint is readily available). Some students love drawing architectural floor plans, and I've even had models of settings made out of Leggos and clay.

> Plots - let students story board plot, design Kamishibai,\* and construct graphic novels and scrapbooks. Some students will love drawing and designing a choose-your-own-adventure retelling on the computer, hyperlinking the choices. If your students have access to videocams, let them rewrite a book or short story as a movie script and film it for screening at "Movie Night."

> Character - let them make art museums to illuminate character, create movie posters and cast roles, draw sociograms to illustrate relationships, create paper dolls with clothing for the characters, construct artifacts (my students have made everything from real phones covered with quotes for Georgia in Dancing in my Nuddy Pants to using real jeans with character quotes written in fabric paint for Sisterhood of the Traveling Pants), or make paper sculptures with character information (one of the eerie experiences of my life was the morning I walked into a darkened classroom filled with life-sized stuffed paper people who were covered with quotations). One very successful project was by a student who made all the characters out of pipe cleaners, posed them in a scene from the book, and decorated them with artifacts that symbolized their essences.

Vocabulary -

> "All You Ever Wanted to Know and More" vocabulary posters - students draw a mnemonic picture for the word on one side of the poster and the other contains everything the student can find out about the word - first use, part of speech, definition, paraphrased definition, antonym, synonym, etc.

> Illustrated word walls - traditional strips with the words, but with drawings to illustrate them.

Grammar

> Parts of speech books - Ruth Heller has a stunning series of parts of speech picture books, but I have student draw and illustrate their own Pop-up Preposition Books - students write a beast fable with a quest and construct a pop-up book to illustrate directional prepositional phrases.

Writing

> Reacting to art - show them transparencies of works of art and let them discover how the artist creates mood. Generate word lists that describe that mood. Have them write good leads that match the painting or sculpture. Discuss how to present a character from a painting with show/not tell. Ask the students to make up plots for possible short stories involving the scene in the picture.

> Use a Life Map (maps of the student's neighborhood/house with places where significant events happened marked) to make a "story bank" for workshop.

> Pass out postcards and ask them to write as a character in the picture.

Poetry

> Use three dimensional constructs as the vehicle for poems (as demonstrated).

> Have the students make Personality Posters as an introduction to your class ("I Am" Poem, Biopoem, and "My Soul" poems in a collage).

> Visual poetry like concrete poems really excite students who are less than thrilled to be writing poems.